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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BASRAH 000013

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SUBJECT: BASRAH GOVERNOR ORGANIZES DEMONSTRATION AGAINST THE BRITISH
- HUNDREDS, NOT THOUSANDS SHOW UP AND IT IS PEACEFUL, NOT VIOLENT

REF: (A) BASRAH 0010 (B) BASRAH 0012

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CLASSIFIED BY: Mark Marrano, Deputy Regional Coordinator, Basrah
Regional Embassy Office, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S/NF) Summary: Basrah Governor Mohammed has increased his rhetoric against the British for their arrest operations, attempting to incite anti-British sentiment and exhorting the local population to stage a large demonstration at the British Consulate. However, the Governor's anger at the British for arresting Iraqi police officers widely known in the community for their criminal behavior, and with links to him, continues to isolate the governor politically on the Provincial Council (See ref A.) A series of IED attacks in which Iraqi children were injured and killed has added to local frustration and anger with the escalating violence. In addition, these attacks were rumored to be the work of supporters of the men who were arrested. End Summary.

¶2. (S/NF) On January 25, an IED exploded as a British military convoy passed by a local school. The force of the blast smashed through the outer wall of the school courtyard seriously injuring 22 young Iraqi students. In the late morning of January 27, a bomb exploded in a market near the Al Qaballah district in Basra. The blast killed one eight-year-old girl and wounded two small boys. Witnesses have claimed seeing a man in an Iraqi police uniform place a bag on the ground in the market, and leave the scene in a police car. The bag blew up minutes later. The Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) cleared two other devices targeting Iraqi civilians the same day. One was placed near a mosque and the other in a popular shopping district. It was rumored the attacks were carried out by supporters of Major Jassim and the other detainees in British custody. (Note: Informed analysis supports this widely held belief. End note.) This has further eroded the Governor's public support.

¶3. (S/NF) The Governor's rhetoric has continued to be more and more inflammatory. Yesterday Al Iraqiya television and Al Basrah radio reported on a conversation with the Governor, where he stated he would not be responsible for any violence perpetrated against the British after the demonstration of January 29. He also called for the immediate withdrawal of the British and the Americans from Basrah. However, private conversations that the British Consul General (CG) had with some Provincial Council (PC) members showed a continuing lack of support for the Governor's position.

¶4. (S/NF) On the morning of January 29, about 250-300 people protested in front of the main gate of the British compound - far below the 2,000 the Governor claimed he would muster. REO Basrah received one report that policemen on duty at the Shaibah police station were ordered to attend the protest or be considered absent from duty. The demonstration was peaceful with many of the protesters carrying banners and signs calling for the release of the detainees. A nine-person delegation of tribal leaders, PC members and the leader of the Office of Muqtada al Sadr (OMS) Basrah entered the compound to meet with the British Consul General. (Note: Governor Mohammed refused to enter, remaining outside the gate with the demonstrators. End note.) In a subsequent conversation with the REO Deputy Regional Coordinator (DRC), the British CG stated that after demanding that the detainees be released, he was given a letter from the group explaining their position. (Note: The letter was not from the PC, but signed only by the delegates attending. End note.) The leader of the OMS then stated that if the detainees were not released there would be violence. The CG sensed that this blunt outburst caused embarrassment among the other members of the delegation.

¶5. (S/NF) The CG mentioned that there appears to be an attempt at an alliance between the Iraqi National Accord and the Fadheela Party. He believes they may intend to remove the Governor before the provincial elections. In fact, the CG was asked about the position of the British government if the Governor were removed from office. The CG responded with the British position of non-interference in the internal affairs and legal processes of Iraq.

¶6. (S/NF) Comment: The next several days are crucial. Clearly Governor Mohammed is becoming more and more isolated, politically and in the public eye. His attempt to impose a long-term boycott of British forces failed. (See ref A.) His efforts to get local tribes involved were effectively countered by UK outreach to the tribal sheiks (See ref B.) Public anger and frustration over the recent IED attacks that injured and killed Iraqi civilians and the less-than expected turnout for

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the demonstration both point to a local population that may finally be fed up with their Governor. Sensing this, the PC may remove him from office in the near future. End Comment.
MARRANO